

Private development could damage historic section of Fort Douglas

■ **Landmark:** Draft EIS warns base's oldest buildings could be damaged if public agency does not buy land.

By Joseph Bauman
Deseret News staff writer

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Unavoidable damage would occur to the historic section of Fort Douglas if the part of the fort that is to be sold ends up in commercial development, warns a draft environmental impact statement.

The fort, founded in October 1862, contains a wealth of architecture styles, including red sandstone "Quartermaster Victorian" homes. The base's oldest buildings — mostly marked for transfer from federal ownership — are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Army is gearing up to close about 55 acres of the fort's 119 acres. The transfer is supposed to be complete by June 1995 but could be speeded up under legislation introduced by Utah's congressmen.

The area to be closed is the northern section of the base and includes many officers' homes, offices and other structures built between 1863 and 1978. Of a 49-acre national historic district at the fort, about half would be closed and half retained by the Army.

Plans endorsed by the congressional delegation call for the 55 acres to be transferred to the University of Utah, which nearly surrounds the fort. The university could use it to form a special campus for honors students and for better access between the Health Science Center and Research Park, as well as other purposes.

The problem is that under the Base Clo-

Comment deadline

Aug. 20 is the deadline for commenting on the draft environmental impact statement regarding the effects of closing part of Fort Douglas. The draft was released this week by the Army. It was prepared by contractors Dames & Moore of Phoenix, Ariz., working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Those wishing to comment on the document should write to:

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sure and Realignment Act, closed bases should be sold, with the money used to finance the closure of the next — and the university can't afford to buy the property, appraised at \$440 million.

The delegation wants the university to be allowed to trade rights for 1,600 acres it was supposed to get from the government but never acquired.

But that might not be approved by Congress. Please see FORT on B2

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gress, as powerful states had to go forward with their own base closures without special deals. If no public agency buys the land, it may be offered to private developers.

Potential future uses of the closed portion of the base are outlined as:

- Residential use.
- Historic park/regional cultural center.
- University facilities.
- Veterans' services.
- Multiple-use development.

"No unavoidable and significant environmental impacts will occur as a result of the first four use alternatives if protective measures to preserve the historic properties of the fort are in place prior to the disposal."

"Unavoidable, adverse impacts to the historic properties are highly probable if the maximum economic potential of the last alternative, multiple-use development, are pursued."

The draft study says it is not a reuse plan and does not identify a preferred future use alternative.

Among approximately 130 structures to be sold is an 1863 adobe building that was used as the office of the fort's first commander, Col. (later Gen.) Patrick Edward Connor. It is presently an office.

In the 1870s, officers' homes were built, many of them at "Officers Circle" near the parade ground overlooking Salt Lake City. Sixteen of these are to be closed, two retained. In addition, many later buildings are to be sold.

When part of the fort is closed, this will "fractionalize" the national

historic landmark, making it harder to uniformly maintain the buildings and grounds to standards that fit in with its historic theme as frontier post," the environmental statement says.

"Future uses of the property may also involve remodeling or reconstruction that could destroy the historic values of the landmark."

Presently, the historic value of the fort's old properties must be considered when the government makes its plans.

The report's summary says, "Impacts to historic properties will be minimal as a result of appropriate protective measures that could prevent damage to the historic value of the fort — if they were implemented — include 'protective covenants or other guarantees,' under which the new owners would promise to protect them."